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### Cosmopolitanism or Competition? Late Medieval Pilgrims at the Eastern Christian Holy Places

*Cosmopolitisme ou Compétition ? Des pèlerins sur les lieux saints chrétiens  
orientaux à la fin du Moyen Âge*

Anthony Bale

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## ***Cosmopolitanism or Competition? Late Medieval Pilgrims at the Eastern Christian Holy Places***

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BETWEEN THE CRUSADERS AND THE OTTOMANS:  
WESTERN VISITORS TO JERUSALEM IN THE LATER MIDDLE AGES

Whilst the Crusades were once seen as a battle between Christians and Muslims, recent historiography has drawn our attention to the ambiguous role and status of Eastern Christian communities during this period.

The consensus has emerged that the Franks and Europeans were initially hostile to local, Eastern Christians, particularly the Byzantine Greeks. However, the new Latin rulers rapidly developed a haphazard tolerance for, and accommodation with, the Greeks: Greek and Syrian monks were never expelled, pre-existing holy sites within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre were preserved, and, by the 1170s, Frankish and Greek interaction was reflected in liturgical and iconographical cross-fertilisation.<sup>1</sup> Little studied, certainly from the European perspective, is the interaction of western European visitors with Eastern Christians after the Crusader period, especially in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>2</sup> I hope here to signal some avenues for further research and

1. See H. Mayer, 1978, and C. MacEvitt, 2007.

pose some questions that might help us think about the status of religious communities in the Holy Land in the later medieval period.

This essay explores travel narratives produced for and by medieval European travellers to Jerusalem, both during the Crusader period (which might broadly be defined as from 1096 to the late thirteenth century) and afterwards, from the early fourteenth century until the middle of

2. Notable exceptions are B. Kedar, 1998, and M. Campaniano, 2012, who consider three fifteenth-century Latin guide-books and their deprecating attitudes towards Greeks, Muslims, and Nestorians.

3. See J. Sumption, 1975, and N. Chareyron, 2005.

4. See E. Weber, 2005 and N. Chareyron, 2013.

5. S. Schein, 2005, p. 65-68; see B. Hamilton, 1977.

the sixteenth century, when a vigorous, popular, and significant Latin Christian pilgrimage industry developed. This industry was under the auspices of the Franciscan order and controlled by the Mamluk rulers. Pilgrims mostly sailed from Venice via Dalmatia and the Greek islands, disembarking at Jaffa, and then taking a tour of the holy sites in and around Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup> A vibrant corpus of travel-writing emerged;<sup>4</sup> as with most travel-writing, the pilgrims' guides to places to visit and their reports of what they saw were fundamentally concerned with defining who was within Christendom and who was outside it and, naturally, they had much to say about Eastern Christians. Can we legitimately frame these

interactions in terms of harmonious cosmopolitanism and the mixing of different communities, or do they represent a competition for Christian holy space in medieval Jerusalem?

From the Frankish conquest of Jerusalem in the late 1090s until the city was captured by Saladin in 1187, the Holy City was remade according to the culture and imagery of *western*, Latin Christendom, an occidental landscape in the Middle East. As Sylvia Schein has comprehensively shown, the emphasis was on Christ's humanity, in particular "the childhood and death of Christ... as well as his poverty and sufferings."<sup>5</sup> From 1187, with the exception of the brief period of Latin control of Christian holy sites from 1229 to 1244, Jerusalem was controlled by Muslims; many Latin holy places were abandoned, converted into mosques, or taken over by other Christian denominations. However, the Franciscans (founded in 1209) began to establish themselves in Jerusalem, and were resident on Mount Zion from 1272. With their characteristic emphasis on Christ's humanity, their commitment to conversion, and their ability to develop new spiritual traditions, the Franciscans became the representatives of

western, Latin Christianity in Jerusalem. Franciscan monks established the *Custodia Terrae Sanctae* in 1333; this was effectively a Latin embassy in Mamluk Palestine, which put the Franciscans into a mutually beneficial relationship with the Mamluks: for both, the pilgrimage industry had significant financial rewards.

The western European pilgrims were visiting a place lost to western Christendom by the failure of the Crusades, but one intimately known to them from devotional literature, liturgy, and travel writing: that which Maurice Halbwachs (1971) ascribed to a kind of “collective memory” in which devotional places were mapped onto the mind.<sup>6</sup> Latin pilgrims travelled as devoted religious witnesses rather than as curious anthropologists, and, as such, their ability to see the local communities was limited; most pilgrims spent their first nights in Franciscan-run hostels in Ramla and were then guided to Jerusalem by Franciscan friars and Mamluk dragomen and cameleers. In and around Jerusalem, the focus of the Latin pilgrims’ visit was the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, always a site in which a significant degree of intermixing with other communities could occur. Other sites, such as Bethany, Mount Quarantine, the River Jordan, and Ein Kerem were visited frequently, but most Latin pilgrims only spent a few moments at such places, in order to gain the spiritual benefits – the indulgence – that such a visit facilitated. At all times the pilgrims were expected to carry a *bulletta* (a formal letter, issued for a fee by Mamluk officials at Jaffa) which allowed safe conduct, and at most sites the pilgrims were expected to pay admission fees to local guides and guards.<sup>7</sup> The relationship between the Franciscans and the Muslim overlords of Jerusalem ended in 1551, when the new Ottoman rulers of Palestine (who had occupied the area in 1516) expelled the Franciscans.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, the meaning of pilgrimage in Western Europe was being transformed, as the Protestant Reformation held with neither the spiritual benefits of place pilgrimage nor the financial rewards of the touristic industry that had sprung up around it.

It is necessary briefly to pause here to mention the status of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the post-Crusader era. The Church is well-known as a shared space in which several Christian traditions co-exist

6. See M. Halbwachs, 1971. His influential work describes places in the Holy Land as mnemonic cues, in a process which itself could be exploited for political ends.

7. N. Chareyron, 2005, p. 72.

8. See A. Cohen, 1990.

and compete. When Saladin concluded a truce with Richard I of England over the status of Jerusalem in 1192, it was agreed that Christian pilgrims should be able to enter the holy sites of Jerusalem, and that no one sect would control the Holy Sepulchre. Yet the Franciscans, established at the Holy Sepulchre in the mid-thirteenth century, were given sole rights amongst Latin Christians to reside there (in 1309).<sup>9</sup> By the 1330s, the Franciscans had, for a fee of 20,000 ducats, gained permission to occupy the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and were given precedence over all Christian sects there.

However, it is clear that Georgians and Greeks maintained small communities at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and Ethiopians and Armenians seem to have maintained chapels adjacent to the Church more or less continuously. The Franciscans retained their pre-eminence until their expulsion in the sixteenth century, but by the 1350s visitors to the Church would have found a mixture of Christian traditions: there were separate altars tended by Armenian, Ethiopian, Georgian, Greek,

9. D. Pringle, 1993-2009, vol. 3, p. 33.

10. See J. Thénaud 1884, p. 96.

Jacobite, Nestorian Nubian, and Syrian Malkite communities. Thus the western, Latin pilgrims' journey to the most holy site in Christendom was also, to some extent, a journey to an arena of comparative Christianity, in which the primacy

of the Pope and the Latin rite was not assured. That this was a far from harmonious situation is exemplified by the destructive violence which broke out in 1510 when the Georgians took the southern Calvary chapel from the Latin Christians and shattered the altar. Diplomacy via the Sultan in Cairo led, in 1512, to the recovery of the Latin Calvary; this incident shows how the very ground of Christ's Crucifixion could be considered contested territory not only between Christians and Muslims, but between Christian sects.<sup>10</sup>

Western European Christian writers were deeply aware that the Holy Land was in non-Christian hands and almost all later medieval accounts of Jerusalem include some kind of reference to reclaiming it from the hands of the "infidels": for example, the widely-read Anglo-French *Book of Marvels and Travels* (c. 1356) attributed to Sir John Mandeville opens with what appears to be an aggressive and assertive demand that

every decent Christian who is able and has the wherewithal should fortify himself to conquer our rightful heritage and chase out those of an evil creed [i.e. the Muslims]. For we are called Christians on account of our Father Christ, and if we are the lawful children of Christ, we must demand the inheritance bequeathed to us by our Father and wrest it from foreigners' hands.<sup>11</sup>

There are, clearly, fault-lines in Mandeville's strident assertiveness: to be a Christian is to follow Christ, a much more generous and open definition than we might expect (for instance, following the Pope and obeying the Catholic Sacraments, the kind of definition that appears elsewhere); the definition of the Mamluks as "foreigners" – outside invaders – suggest the idea of a native population: but who or what are these natives?

Such curiosity and hostility were often united in accounts of the Greek Christians and a major recent study, by Christopher MacEvitt, has defined the relationship between Latin and Eastern Christians as a kind of "rough tolerance".<sup>12</sup> Mandeville defended his inclusion of a hostile description of Greek Orthodoxy thus:

[...] if all these things are not relevant to the journey, they are nevertheless relevant in so far as I have undertaken to show some of the customs and manners and differences of these countries. And because [Byzantium/Greece] is the nearest country that varies from, and conflicts with, our faith and religious texts, I have written it here so that you can see the differences between our faith and theirs, for many people take great pleasure and comfort to hear talk of unfamiliar things.<sup>13</sup>

This passage encapsulates the paradox of much travel writing: Mandeville highlights "conflicts" and "differences" between "home" and "abroad", yet his account of the Greek Christians – "Even though it is true that all people in the land of Greece are Christian, it's a very different faith from ours"<sup>14</sup> – implicitly queries the "truth" of Latin Christianity; for Mandeville, the Eastern Christians opened up a world of relativism and similarities. His recourse here to the "pleasure and comfort" in "unfamiliar things", invoking entertainment, curiosity, and a pleasure in difference that sits uneasily with the pilgrims' pious intentions.

11. J. Mandeville, 2012, p. 6.

12. C. MacEvitt, 2007.

13. J. Mandeville, 2012, p. 14.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

## WESTERN PILGRIMS AT THE MONASTERY OF THE CROSS, JERUSALEM

The memorialisation of biblical events in specific places was both politically charged and politically contingent: the “invention” of holy traditions in a specific place was not because of the demands of geography, archaeology, or history, but of the collective social and religious needs in the changing “here and now” of the Holy Land. As Halbwachs showed, mental images from the Gospels not only “reconstructed” the past, but also shaped the present:

À mesure qu'on s'éloignait des événements, le dogme modifiait profondément l'histoire de Jésus. Il n'est pas étonnant qu'il ait transformé aussi l'image qu'on s'est faite de Jérusalem. Les lieux saints n'ont plus été seulement ceux qui furent le théâtre de l'activité de Jésus, mais des emplacements consacrés parce que les vérités essentielles du christianisme y reportaient la pensée des fidèles.<sup>15</sup>

Multiple traditions were present in medieval Jerusalem concerning the origins of the Cross on which Christ was crucified. What was the Cross made from? And from where, literally, did the Cross come? Until 1187 the main cross relic was held at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre but, following the fall of Jerusalem to Saladin, the cross

15. M. Halbwachs, 1971, p. 125.

16. See B. Baert, 2004.

17. Gervase of Tilbury, 2002, p. 500-501.

relic disappeared, only to reappear in the form of multiple relics throughout Europe.<sup>16</sup> The Cross, which had been so intimately touched by Jesus' sweat and blood, also came to some extent to act as a proxy for Christ's body itself: devotion to the Crucifix in and of itself was manifested in Crucifix jewellery, elaborate reliquaries which held splinters

of the True Cross, and crucifix graffiti which proliferated at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. One English writer, Gervase of Tilbury (c. 1150 – c. 1228), wrote that “some [people] maintain that any part of the cross which had been in contact with the Lord's bare flesh or was stained at all with his blood was immediately born off to heaven, away from human touch and sight; they say it will appear at the last on the Day of Judgement.”<sup>17</sup> This “living wood”, as it was frequently described, came to assume new lives as devotional narratives grew out of stories of the fourth-century Finding (*inventio*) of the Cross by St Helena. Likewise,



stories of the Cross's origins were elaborated. Late medieval responses to the origins of the Cross allow us to explore the fraught ways in which devotional narratives not only constructed the sacred past but also constructed sacred sites.

New traditions about the Cross developed in the twelfth century, both in the Crusader kingdom and in Western written sources, as the Frankish occupation of Jerusalem sought to re-present Jerusalem not simply as the city in which Christ died but also as the "City of the Life of Christ" and a place in which pilgrim-crusaders "felt that they were re-enacting in their own lives the sufferings of Christ."<sup>18</sup> This included the Crusaders' "Helena" chapel at the Holy Sepulchre, celebrating the site where the *inventio*, the Finding, of the Cross, was said to have taken place.<sup>19</sup>

These invented traditions were crystallized in Jacobus de Voragine's hugely influential *Legenda Aurea* or *Golden Legend* (c. 1260). Voragine wrote that the Cross had been made from four kinds of wood: palm, cedar, cypress, and olive but, prior to this, the wood of the Cross came from the time of Adam and Seth (Genesis 4-5), in a story based on one given in *The Gospel of Nicodemus* (the apocryphal gospel of Greek origins which greatly expands the cruelty of the Jews in the torturing of Christ). Seth planted a shoot of the tree that was, eventually, used by Solomon to build his "forest house" made of cedars. However, the wood did not fit into the building and was discarded, and used as a bridge "over a certain pond"; when the Queen of Sheba came to cross this bridge she received a vision, informing her "that the Savior of the world would one day hang upon this very same wood." She would not, therefore, walk on it, and the log was again discarded, "buried in the deepest bowels of the earth." At an unspecified later date, according to the story, "the pond called Probatica" welled up, and the wood floated to the surface of the pond; the Jews saw it and only then used it to make the Cross on which to crucify Christ.<sup>20</sup>

Voragine's "pond called Probatica" (known in Hebrew as Bethsaida) is mentioned in the Gospel of John (5:2-5) as the place where the sick and lame were cured by an angel stirring the waters; it was routinely identified, in the Middle Ages, with the Sheep Pool in Jerusalem's Muslim Quarter. During the Crusader occupation of the city, a chapel was built

18. S. Schein, 2005, p. 66-67.

19. See B. Baert, 2004, p. 167-175.

20. This version is condensed from Jacobus de Voragine, 1995, vol. 1, p. 277-278; on this text see B. Baert, 2004, p. 194-201.

here (the ruins of which can still be seen), where a Cross relic had been miraculously revealed to Ramiro Sanchez (1070-1116) of Navarre.<sup>21</sup>

This is the narrative of the Cross's origins familiar to Frankish and later Latin pilgrims; their Cross had a heritage from Adam, Seth, Solomon, the Queen of Sheba, and was then used as a bridge over a pond, then

21. D. Pringle, 1993-2009, vol. 3, p. 396.

22. *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 390.

23. J. Mandeville, 2012, p. 46.

24. W. Wey, 2010, p. 37;

J. Mandeville, 2012, p. 49.

discarded, and only then was it fashioned by the Jews into the Cross of the Passion. In the post-Crusader period, the Chapel of the Sheep Pool became a mosque but remained much-visited by Christian pilgrims, and features in the most widely-read pilgrims' accounts. Amongst later western pilgrims, Niccolò of Poggibonsi, visiting in the late 1340s, is unusual in recalling this as the place

where Solomon had discarded the piece of wood that would become Christ's Cross.<sup>22</sup> The popular account given by Mandeville, which was translated into many European languages and survives in about 300 copies, mentions the "Probatia Piscina" and connects it with the place mentioned in the Gospel of John, but does not mention the story of the wood of the Cross.<sup>23</sup>

At the same time, a related site had developed in the Kidron Valley, which also celebrated the origin of the Wood of the Cross. The English pilgrim William Wey visited Jerusalem twice, first in 1458 and then in 1462, and visited not one but four sites connected with the Cross's early history. Wey was a devout but sceptical pilgrim, whose journeys show elements of humanism: throughout his extensive writing, he was profoundly interested in translation between languages, in the origin of stories, and, for the most part, his book is accommodating towards the variety of cultures and traditions he encountered in Palestine.

Wey mentioned the Probatia Piscina but did not include there an account of it as the place where the wood of the Cross was discarded. Instead, he mentioned another place at the River Kidron, which Wey would have read about in Mandeville's *Book*, ultimately based on Voragine's version in the *Golden Legend*.<sup>24</sup> According to Wey's version of this account

[...] in the middle of the Valley of Jehoshophat is the stream Cedron which is produced by the great amount of rain coming down from the

mountains of Olivet. It is said that the wood of the Holy Cross lay across the stream for a long time like a bridge, but when the Queen of Sheba came to Solomon in Jerusalem, she was loath to walk over it because she knew in her spirit its future miraculous power.

Many pilgrims in the later period visited a site here, although it is not clear where or what precisely they venerated; the French pilgrim, the Seigneur de Caumont, visiting in the mid-fifteenth century, mentions "*le ruiseau de Cedron ou fut par long tamps l'albre de le croix ou Jhesu Crist fut pendu vii ans vii carantenes de indulgence*" ("the brook of Kidron where for a long time there was the tree of the Cross on which Jesus Christ was hanged: an indulgence of seven years and seven quarentals").<sup>25</sup> The traditions surrounding the Kidron site had probably been fostered by the ancient Church of St Mary of the Valley of Jehoshaphat, originally built around the tomb of the Virgin Mary. This had been rebuilt and re-founded in the twelfth century and seems, by c. 1165, to have owned the entire Kidron Valley; whilst veneration of the Virgin was undoubtedly the community's main focus, it also had a relic of the True Cross.<sup>26</sup> In the later period, following the Crusades, this area again became a mixed space of various congregations, with Georgian, Armenian, Jacobite, and Ethiopian altars alongside Franciscans and, of course, Muslims venerating the Virgin Mary too. However, there is little evidence of a formal church or shrine of the Kidron relic being established in the later period, even as it was on many pilgrims' itineraries. This kind of *informal* pilgrimage site might be said to characterise many of the Latin pilgrims' itineraries in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries: often they were visiting places long since lost to Latin control.

Apart from this group of related stories about the origins of the Cross, a quite separate counterpart to this dominant narrative was presented to Western pilgrims during their trip to the Holy Land. This came in the form of the holy tree-stump from which the Cross was said to have grown, at the Valley of the Cross, a short distance to the west of Jerusalem. Not only did this site offer a competing account of the Cross, but it also offered, in its Georgian rite, a strange and unfamiliar milieu for Latin visitors.

The Monastery of the Cross was an early Byzantine foundation, said by the Georgians to have been founded by the Georgian Prince Mirian III of

25. N. Caumont, 1975, p. 43.

26. D. Pringle, 1993-2009, vol. 3, p. 289.

Georgia (d. c. 361 CE). Mirian was a contemporary of St Constantine's, and, in a larger and general sense, the Georgian myth of the Cross can be seen as part of the imaginative claims to the sacred geography of Jerusalem which Constantine's mother, St Helena, so influentially began. The (re-)building of the Monastery of the Cross – more or less as we see it today – took place in the eleventh century, probably funded by David the Great (David II/IV), king of Georgia (1073-1125).<sup>27</sup> With a few interruptions – including a short period as a Sufi mosque in the late thirteenth century<sup>28</sup> – the monastery remained a Georgian foundation, closely linked to the Georgian royal family, and Denys Pringle has

27. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 33.

28. C. Müller and J. Pahlitzsch, 2004.

29. D. Pringle, 1993-2009, vol. 2, p. 34.

30. J. Wilkinson, 1998, p. 108.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 202.

noted that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries “the Georgians [were] the most favoured of the Christian communities in Jerusalem” in the eyes of the Mamluks.<sup>29</sup> In the seventeenth century the monastery gradually became a Greek institution, which it remains today. Throughout the Middle Ages, the monastery was visited by Latin Christians, and their accounts of it help us explore the mixing of

Christian groups in medieval Jerusalem.

One of the crusaders' first tasks following their occupation of the city in 1099 seems to have been to consolidate and extend traditions regarding St Helena's finding of the True Cross. The Franks owned the main cross relic – the True Cross itself – which they used in their liturgical processions and, according to many sources, they carried it into battle with them. However, we gain some glimpses of the Georgian Monastery in early Crusader-era accounts. Saewulf (visiting in 1101–03) wrote:

The Church of the Holy Cross is about one mile from Jerusalem to the west, in the place where the Holy Cross was cut from its tree. This too had a very noble and lovely church, but it is in ruins because of the pagans. Nevertheless the church is not too much destroyed, but only the buildings and cells around it.<sup>30</sup>

Saewulf shows no awareness of the monastery as a Georgian foundation, and it appears as one of the standard, if dilapidated, sites on his route. Likewise, the twelfth-century accounts of Fretellus and the anonymous *Work on Geography* tersely state that “At the second mile is the place where the wood of the Lord's Cross grew”;<sup>31</sup> such accounts,

however, make it clear that, for the diligent pilgrim, the Georgian establishment was on the itinerary. The *Second Guide for Pilgrims* states that there is “the Monastery of the Georgians that is called “At the Stump” or “The Trunk” because there it is said that the tree for the Holy Cross was cut down. Over the place of the stump an altar has been set up.”<sup>32</sup> The Frankish pilgrim Theodoric, writing in 1172, mentioned the “very fertile and well-tended valley” near Jerusalem “in which is located a noble church.” He continued:

It stands in honour of our Lord Jesus Christ and of his beloved Mother, and there in a hollow altar, the place is revered in which the trunk stood from which was cut the Cross. On it the Saviour hung for our Salvation.

But he also added a further legendary and rather anecdotal piece of information:

The Syrians are in charge of this church, and it is strongly defended against Gentile attacks by towers, walls, and bulwarks...King Solomon is said to have cut this tree down, and to have placed it in a suitable position until the coming of the Saviour. He is said to have had a cross carved in it, for he saw in spirit that the salvation of the world would be assured by the death of Christ.<sup>33</sup>

Theodoric’s reference to the Syrians seems to be nothing more than a confusion about who or what the Georgians were, echoed in other accounts which describe the Georgians as “Spaniards” (John Phocas, 1185, confusing *Iveria* and *Iberia*), “Armenians” (Lionardo Frescobaldi, 1384), and “Greek monks” (von Harff, in the 1490s).<sup>34</sup> Theodoric displays an awareness of the crusader-era legend about king Solomon, that the wood of the Cross was from the Solomon’s time.

Crusader-era pilgrims seem to have been content that the Monastery of the Cross was a holy site, the origin of the tree from which Christ’s Cross was made, and we find little anti-Georgian sentiment in western pilgrims’ accounts of the site. This echoes MacEvitt’s suggestion that “On a daily basis, in rural churches, in pilgrimage shrines, on building sites, and in scriptoria, local Christians,

32. *Ibid.*, p. 241.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 308.

34. These sources are taken from G. Peradze, 1937; on Jacques de Vitry’s more extended account of the Georgians, see C. Cannuyer, 1983.

resident Franks and pilgrims, met, rubbed shoulders, swapped stories, and shared in the common Christian heritage of the Holy Land and Syria.”<sup>35</sup>

This was true too for later pilgrims. On his 1458 visit, Wey visited the Georgian monastery en route to Jerusalem from Ein Kerem. He wrote:

As one goes on, closer to Jerusalem, in a valley on the left, is the monastery of the Holy Cross where Georgians minister. Behind and beneath the high altar is a hole where the wood of the holy cross grew.<sup>36</sup>

Wey seems to have had little curiosity about the Georgians’ religion. Moreover, the location “The place where the Holy Cross grew” was included in Wey’s mnemonic itineraries, where indulgences could be gained, in the mountains around Jerusalem;<sup>37</sup> this suggests that the Monastery of the Cross was a semi-official Latin pilgrimage site even as it remained a Georgian foundation.

In addition, Wey included an account of a further local tradition,

35. C. MacEvitt, 2005, p. 135.

36. W. Wey, 2010, p. 87.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

38. Much of the western end of the Church of the Nativity was altered by Crusader reconstruction of the narthex and northern aisle and transept, and by the thirteenth-century rebuilding of the Armenian convent. See W. Harvey, 1935, p. 4-7.

at Bethlehem, that in the north-west corner of the Church of the Nativity there was a “small hole... where it is said that a dry, barren tree once stood. At the time of the Nativity it flourished and was green and formed one of the timbers of Christ’s cross.” Little is known about this minor shrine at Bethlehem, which probably has an Armenian or Franciscan origin.<sup>38</sup> My point here is that, by the later fifteenth century, there were at least three different places to go and see the site from which the Cross originated, each of them “authentic” in as much as they were spiritually valuable and worthy of

visiting; moreover, supporting evidence for each could be found both “on the ground” and in canonical texts.

#### WESTERN PILGRIMS AT THE ARMENIAN CHURCHES OF ST JAMES AND THE CONVENT OF THE OLIVE TREE

A comparative, and to some extent parallel, case can be gleaned from the pilgrims’ interactions with the Armenian community in Jerusalem. Apart from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the focal point of the Latin

pilgrims' experience was the Franciscan settlement on Mount Zion, just a few hundred yards outside the Old City, beyond the Armenian Quarter. At Mount Zion there were various holy sites – including the Cenacle, the site of the Last Supper – and the Franciscan monastery where clerical visitors stayed and where a library held an array of information about the Holy Sites. To get to Mount Zion, the pilgrims passed through what is now the Armenian Quarter, which, during the Crusader period had been the site of considerable contact and cross-fertilization with the Frankish community.

Pilgrims often mention these places but very frequently omit to identify them as Armenian foundations. Mandeville mentions the Georgian Church of St Saviour on Mount Zion and then, “as you go to Mount Zion”, “a beautiful church dedicated to St James”, but he omitted to mention that it is an Armenian foundation.<sup>39</sup> This cathedral was built in the 1150s and 1160s, during a period of good relations between the Armenians and the Latin patriarch.<sup>40</sup> Less clear are the origins of the neighbouring foundation of the Convent of the Olive Tree (properly the Convent of the Holy Archangels), which was certainly an Armenian foundation by 1314;<sup>41</sup> ambiguous and indistinct medieval traditions held that the Convent of the Olive Tree was built on the site of the house of Caiaphas (or, sometimes, Annas) and was therefore one of the places in which Jesus was detained during his Passion. The Convent of the Olive Tree represents the development of “new” traditions in the post-crusader period, as it emerged in the fourteenth century, the same period in which Franciscan pilgrimage to the Holy Land was becoming established. An Armenian church had probably stood on this site for many centuries, but new dedications and traditions were not unusual, and, in this case, the “invention” of the Prison of Christ there in the twelfth or thirteenth century was undoubtedly due to the distinctive kind of spirituality of the medieval city and its emphasis on Christ's humanity.

Visiting in 1462, William Wey was clear that these were Armenian foundations but he valued them as pilgrimage sites. He wrote:

A stone's throw to the north [of Mt Zion] is the Church of Our Saviour; Armenians minister there. On the high altar of this church

39. J. Mandeville, 2012, p. 47.

40. See D. Pringle, 1993-2009, vol. 3, p. 169.

41. D. Pringle, 1993-2009, vol. 3, p. 112.



lies that stone which was rolled to the mouth of Jesus Christ's tomb: it is really large...and is made of white marble. Next to the southern edge of the altar is a cell where Christ was tied to the column the whole night. This church used to be the house of the priest Caiaphas, and is where Christ was scorned, examined, spat upon, robbed, struck on the head, denied by Peter three times and shut up in the cell...until he could be sent to Pilate. [...] Next, as one crosses from Mount Zion towards Jerusalem, on the right of the road, is the Armenians' church. There is a small chapel on the east side where the Apostle St James, the brother of St John the Evangelist, was beheaded by Herod.<sup>42</sup>

Wey described the Armenian churches reasonably accurately and it seems very likely that he visited them. Like the Monastery of the Cross, the Armenian sites frequently appeared in Latin itineraries of the fifteenth century, and these places had become venerable sites for the Catholic pilgrims to visit.

However, to locate the Prison of Christ in the Armenian Quarter directly contradicted other religious traditions in Jerusalem, not least the energetic development of a Greco-Franciscan Prison of Christ in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, itself based on a pre-Crusader Greek

42. W. Wey, 2010, p. 73.

43. This site is explored in greater detail in Bale, 2016.

44. D. Pringle, 2013, p. 161.

45. See J. Folda, 1978, p. 140-141.

tradition. From the earliest years of the twelfth century, Crusader pilgrims had visited this altar, in the north-eastern corner of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre; the site was generally said to be where Christ was held as the Cross was prepared and it became an integral part of the Jerusalem pilgrimage and remains a holy site today.<sup>43</sup> The multiple holy prisons in Jerusalem spread Christ's captivity over several different incidents and meant, effectively, that there were different Prisons for different sects. The Frankish "Chapel of the Repose," a building on the Via Dolorosa, was described (in Ernoul's *Chronicle* of c. 1231) as a "prison where He was placed on the night when He was arrested in Gethsemane".<sup>44</sup> The Chapel of the Repose, however, probably did not survive long after Christian access to the holy sites became difficult in the late 1180s and Jaroslav Folda states that the Chapel had been removed by 1244.<sup>45</sup> The houses of Annas, Caiaphas, and Pilate were all described as Christ's prisons, and these were connected with both the Crusader-era Church of St Saviour (a site also associated with the imprisonment of St Peter) just outside the city walls and the Armenian Convent of the Olive



Tree, which to this day contains a Prison of Christ, at the site of an olive tree to which Christ was said to have been chained.<sup>46</sup> Today's visitor to Jerusalem can visit further old/new Prisons: first, the Greek Orthodox Praetorium "prison" in the Via Dolorosa names an ancient cavern as the Prison of Christ, a tradition dating from the twentieth century but also sometimes connected with the House of Pilate;<sup>47</sup> secondly, the Catholic church of St Peter in Gallicantu on Mount Zion uses circumspect signage to name ancient cisterns underneath as Caiaphas' house, although the site has only been identified as one of Christ's prisons since the 1880s.

Western pilgrims frequently visited the prisons of Christ at the Holy Sepulchre and those in the Houses of Annas and Caiaphas. This caused some people disquiet: Mandeville said, writing about the Prison in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre that "on the north side is a place where our Lord was put in prison, [but] he was imprisoned in many other places too", whilst John of Würzburg noted how some pilgrims grumbled about the site's authenticity ("Others [...] have other opinions about this place, as I heard on the spot"). The point here is that, as with the Monastery of the Cross, western pilgrims did more than simply acknowledge the existence of local and eastern Christian traditions: they engaged with them. Moreover, we find in their texts the striking fact that medieval pilgrims could believe two or more things to be "true" at the same time. Pilgrims were travelling as devotional "readers" through a legible landscape inscribed with sacred traditions, and thus they brought a fundamentally medieval mode of reading with them, in which the prototype, the copy, and the symbol all had equal and related worth and meaning. Just as medieval Christian reading practices were based around glossing texts, discerning cryptic meanings, and the co-existence of different versions of the same stories, moving through the landscape of the Holy Land was an exercise in interpretation and imagination.

46. L.-H. Vincent and F.-M. Abel, 1912, vol. 2, p. 500-505.

47. See M. Halbwachs, 1971, p. 75-80.

#### COSMOPOLITANISM OR COMPETITION?

Most pilgrimage texts were designed to reflect *scientia* – good, Christian knowledge – rather than *curiositas* – the accumulation of irrelevant information; as such, it is not surprising that they generally

omit accounts of local information.<sup>48</sup> Most pilgrims' accounts include some instrumental information – about the hiring of local guides, or the changing of money – but we gain very little sense of local Jewish and Muslim communities, or daily practicalities of, for instance, food or hygiene. If they include mentions of Jews and Muslims, they are mostly disparaging. However, almost all pilgrims *do* include an account of non-Latin sites, usually dealing extensively with the Greeks and often with the Armenians, the Georgians, and others. Does the lack of antipathy to these latter groups, and the sharing of their sacred spaces, constitute a kind of cosmopolitanism?

Cosmopolitanism, as defined through its Greek etymology “*cosmo polis*”, evokes citizenship of the world. In a cosmopolitan setting, groups come together to form a shared community of mutual respect or benefit, based perhaps on ritual, identity, faith, customs, or economy. Pilgrimage

48. On these terms see C. Zacher, 1976.

49. See J.-P. Mahé, 2004.

50. See B. Kedar, 1974, and B. Kedar, 2001.

51. O. Limor, 2007.

was one arena in which cross-cultural contact was inherent, and, remarkably, a complementary process can be seen from the twelfth century onwards in the form of, for instance, Armenian pilgrims to the shrine of St James at Santiago in Galicia.<sup>49</sup> It is clear that later medieval Jerusalem was not divided or segmented in any rigid or clear way, at least in the eyes of the pilgrims who visited it. It was a place where Latin Christians and some eastern Christian communities could engage in relationships of religious respect and touristic hospitality.

In particular, thinking about pilgrimage as a forum of interaction can be a corrective to the more belligerent kinds of contact (like “holy war”) and relationships of dominance and subjection usually associated with this era. It is clear that there were many localised kinds of interaction, and pilgrims' shrines seem to have been one of the most important stages for such interactions. Benjamin Kedar has explored mixed Christian and Muslim shrines, such as at Sebaste, Saidnaya, Ain al-Bakar, and the Hebron Tomb of the Patriarchs.<sup>50</sup> Likewise, Ora Limor has investigated shared sacred spaces between Christianity, Judaism and Islam, and has presented a penetrating account of shared traditions at the Tomb of David on Mount Zion.<sup>51</sup> MacEvitt, in his paradigm of “rough tolerance”, explores the growing knowledge amongst Latin Christians of the eastern cults of St Saba and St Mary the Egyptian;

MacEvitt suggests that “in the period of the crusades [...] a new pattern emerged. Western pilgrims accounts show an increased interest in non-biblical sacred events in the Holy Land [...] the source of this interest in local saints was the increased contact between resident Franks and local Christians.” The trend amongst medieval Latin pilgrims’ accounts is to show a notable openness to the Georgians and Armenians amongst Eastern Christian groups.

This is not to propose an idealistic kind of cosmopolitanism, or to argue that medieval Jerusalemites enjoyed an egalitarian utopia or an Iberian-style *convivencia*. However, we must acknowledge the peaceable, respectful, and cooperative elements of pilgrimage culture, as well as the more obvious relationships of prejudice, exploitation, misunderstanding, and financial interdependence. The Mamluks are known for their relative acceptance of and respect for other religions, and in particular their accommodation of a spectrum of religious worship in medieval Jerusalem, and Jerusalem offers a trans-national example of a place which sits outside the borders of the nation state and exists as an imaginative and devotional space for different groups. Furthermore, pilgrimage culture in late medieval Jerusalem offers something different from the *dhimmi* groups of medieval Islamic cities – according to this model, religious groups were rather rigid, space was often quite strictly circumscribed, and there was a firm hierarchy, with Islam at the top. The situation in post-crusader Jerusalem, at least as the Latin pilgrims saw it, was more complex.

Pilgrimage culture offers a challenging alternative to what has been the dominant narrative of interaction, but this was usually a multifaceted, highly local, and often profoundly textual kind of interaction. What we do find from western pilgrims is an abiding engagement with Eastern Christian sites. To conclude, one might suggest that pilgrims were being neither cosmopolitan nor competitive, but rather they were doing what medieval pilgrims *did* – that is, moving through a world of stories and narratives made material, a world experienced personally. The fact of a degree of religious pluralism should not suggest either conflict or harmony. Time and again we see how medieval pilgrims behaved like readers, engaging in a kind of comparative literature, placing narrative and stories side by side. In this way, more than one thing could be true at the same time – that is, there could be more than one original

site of the tree of the Cross, and more than one holy prison. Shirin Khanmohamadi has recently explored medieval travellers' accounts in terms of the ways in which they report diverse laws – different religions and customs – whilst showing disquiet about doctrinal difference.<sup>52</sup> As Khanmohamadi shows, the very act of writing about other sects and other faiths – what we might call medieval anthropology – involved an intelligent engagement with unfamiliar and varied groups of people. The encounters staged in Latin pilgrimage to the Holy Land can be

52. S. Khanmohamadi, 2014, especially p. 11-36.

53. N. Saul, 1997, p. 153.

seen as a part of a wider broadening of the West's perspective on the world; an intriguing counterpart to the pilgrims' visits to the Eastern churches can be seen in the embassy of Leo VI of Armenia to England in the 1380s; having been deposed by the Mamluks, Leo mediated between the French and the English kings.<sup>53</sup> This was part of a world which was becoming interested in the opportunities offered by the wider world, a shift reflected not only in the growing desire for travel and travel literature, but also in developing missionary activity in the Far East, the establishment of Genoese and Venetian trading colonies throughout the Eastern Mediterranean, the international networks of trade and capital that characterise fourteenth- and fifteenth-century European prosperity, and the growth of the technology of mapping. In other words, the European pilgrims' engagement with other groups can be put into an emerging culture of internationalist pluralism.

On the one hand, there is an element of silencing at work, as the Latin Christians were content to engage with Armenian and Georgian holy spaces largely without acknowledging difference or respecting theological integrity. But, more hopefully, we can read this as evidence of a worldview open to other traditions. Armenian and Georgian sites were able to take part in the financial rewards of pilgrimage and were recognised by a very considerable number of pilgrims from the west; the Latin pilgrims adopted, and to some extent adapted, eastern Christian sites, finding there a larger Christian community of which they made themselves a part.

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